

Legacy Tips & Tools

The Importance of Forgiveness

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Forgiveness is a process. It can be written about as part of your legacy document.

Reflection:

As we reflect on our lives in this season of forgiveness, we note things we've said or done that we wish we hadn't. We've made mistakes, done things we regret, hurt those we love-some accidentally, some through neglect, and some with purpose.

One content area of writing a legacy letter (spiritual-ethical will) is to acknowledge and take responsibility for what we've done, to ask forgiveness, to make amends.

Read what mother Sharon Strassfeld wrote to her daughter as she was leaving home for college: "I have no way to lessen for you the pain you suffered in having been an acutely sensitive child in the hands of a strong and assertive mother. But I will tell you that always, always, I gave you the best that I had available to give. And sometimes my best was simply not good enough. I'm sorry for that."

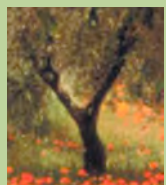
Our written apologies and regrets are acts of love that will be appreciated now and long after we're gone.

And you, the writer, gains something too. This writing lightens the load of carrying unfinished business around as part of your personal baggage; it can release you from guilt. It may make you more forgiving of others as well. Here is Archbishop Desmond Tutu on forgiving: "To forgive is to abandon your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim."

Writing does not necessarily include sending/sharing what you write. It is your choice whether to send the letter now or later, or to destroy it in a ritual act.

Practice:

1. List 3 people to whom you want to offer amends or ask forgiveness (they can be living or not).
2. Next to each write a short description of the harm(s) done.
3. Choose one person from your list and write your reasons for seeking resolution.
4. Write a 15 minute letter to that person that focuses on your description of the harm done and your amend.
5. Put the letter away at least overnight, and then reread it, and decide whether and when you will send it. If you decide "not now" put the letter with your personal papers, and bring it out regularly to reconsider your decision. 6. Repeat this practice with the other two people on your list, and add as many as you wish.



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